



Regional transit plan gets thumbs up from SCAG

By MARC SCHANZ, Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES — A near unanimous decision by Southern California Association of Governments members has cleared the way for a sweeping 25-year transit plan for Southern California.

At a special meeting of the regional council of SCAG in Los Angeles on Wednesday, the governing board of the regional agency voted 50-2 to approve "Destination 2030," which covers transit and infrastructure improvements for six Southern California counties with a cost of nearly \$210 billion over 25 years.

Imperial County Supervisor Hank Kuiper, a second vice president of the organization, voted for the plan.

With nearly 6 million new residents and 3 million new jobs in the forecast, the plan takes into account the land use and demographics of the region to address transportation needs.

"To provide the next generation with a strong, viable and affordable transportation system, (we) must work hard today to ensure that the investments we make maximize the performance of our transportation network," said Brea City Councilwoman Bev Perry.

Since October, when SCAG, which covers all of Imperial, Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange, Los Angeles and Ventura counties, unveiled its "Destination 2030" plan, there has been significant input and development to hundreds of regional transit projects such as rapid bus transit corridors, rail projects and road improvements.

With Imperial County's population slated to increase 85 percent by 2030, the county's infrastructure is set for continued improvement.

Embedded in the plan are the priorities of several Imperial County government bodies, including longstanding road projects, including improvements on highways 111, 115 and 78, a new north-south corridor along Forrester Road, an improved overpass for Dogwood Road in addition to improvements to the Interstate 8 corridor.

SCAG representatives said the plan must now be submitted to the Federal Highway and Transit Administration for approval.

"The federal government is looking at whether or not the plan will alleviate congestion, as well as its compliance with clean air standards," said Jeff Lustgarten, a SCAG spokesman.

Despite the ongoing debate over state and federal transit money, Lustgarten said 75 percent of the plan's project funding comes from local sources such as sales taxes.

One of the prominent projects covered in the plan is the expansion of magnetic levitation rail, also known as maglev, through the region. High-speed magnetic rail is planned along the Los Angeles-Riverside corridor and is being pushed for expansion through the Coachella Valley into Imperial County.

"The transportation committee has looked at the expansion of that service for Imperial County, but more work needs to be done," Lustgarten said. "The lines that are currently in the plan have been studied for ridership as well as financing."

The link between high-speed rail and the development of regional airports — such as the one being courted by Imperial County officials to replace San Diego's Lindbergh Field — is similar in other areas of the region, Lustgarten said.

"Airports and rail are going to be a way we try to alleviate congestion around major transit hubs," Lustgarten said.

The plan is scheduled to be approved by the federal government by June.

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